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EDUCATION

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EDUCATION

ADDRESS BY SIR S. SUBRAMANIA IYER, KT.C.I.E., TO THE TEACHERS' INSTITUTE, SAIDAPET

I AM sure I shall not be taken to task, if on an occasion like this, I venture to call attention to certain views that have been expressed, not long since, by a very distinguished friend of mine, with reference to the subject of education in which none is more deeply interested than the body of experts at whose invitation I occupy the chair to-day.

The views in question will be found trenchantly expounded in the comparatively short chapter entitled "The Problems of Education" in Bhagavan Das's book, *The Science of Social Organisation*, published only the other day. I do not know whether the name of this thinker and scholar is

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as well known here as it deserves to be. It is only right to say that his conclusions on the subject are not the result of mere theoretical study, but also of actual experience as an educationist long connected with the Central Hindu College, Benares.

I shall not now attempt in any way to summarise his views, but leave you to ascertain them, if so inclined, from the instructive pages of the part of the book mentioned. The practical object aimed at by my friend would, if I am not mistaken, seem to be the revival, so far as it may be possible in these days, of the system of education and training recommended by the Manu, the great Law-giver; of which one of the features was the moulding of the character of the pupil by means of his residence with the preceptor during the period of pupilage. That this system was actually in vogue in many parts of India is undeniable, and in ancient times it probably was very general in the country. The disappearance of the system from the face of the land was, of course, due to the class ordained to be the custodians of

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knowledge and teachers ...sing to be what they were intended to be, in consequence of changes, social or political, which are inevitable in the evolution of the different races of mankind. The point for consideration is whether educational work can, to any extent, be once more carried on in the light and spirit of the old system, so as to avoid some of the defects which modern methods disclose.

In my humble judgment it would be rash to give an unqualified negative answer to the question. The matter would seem to be one for actual trial. The Government Member for education, I presume, cannot, be expected, at least for some time to come to be able to persuade his colleagues to sanction any such experiments by the Department of Public Instruction. It should not, however, be unreasonable to suggest that the authorities in the territories of Indian Rulers, Potentates and Chiefs, should start and carry on educational work on the old, simple and effective lines, adapting it to modern conditions. Be this as it may, it is to my mind the plain duty of the

Hindu Community to try to supply the want of indigenous institutions, maintained at an expense far less than that of those under State management, and providing for instruction and training better suited to the real needs of the generality of the inhabitants of this country. Of course, this can be done only if we can secure men to come forward to undertake the work of the teacher, more on account of the nobility of the calling than for the sake of the pecuniary profit which its exercise would bring. It is fervently to be hoped that the day is not distant when such workers will not be scarce.

In the Central Hindu College with which my friend Bhagavan Das has, as I have already said, been long connected, we have an instance which will go to support this hope. As a local daily stated the other day, no less than fifteen members of the staff of that College—three Europeans and twelve Indians, all of high education and attainments, render gratuitous service. This is but a small beginning. Among about a thousand youths that are receiving educa-

tion in that institution alone, which is entirely unaided from the State Exchequer, there are, I believe, a considerable number who mean to devote themselves to similar unselfish service to their country when the time comes. The only other thing required to carry on successfully the sort of work under consideration is the finding of funds wanted for the construction of healthy but inexpensive school-buildings and quarters, both for the staff and the pupils, as also for making old age provision in respect of the former in addition to their maintenance during the period of their actual service. I do not think I shall be casting any unmerited slur on my countrymen if I say that at present they will not make any contribution towards such cost from their private purse, though no other object would be worthier of such a support on their part. Nevertheless the money needed for a few institutions of the kind, that would serve as models, can easily be found from sources which are ready to hand, if only the community will rise to a sense of its duty to utilise those sources

as it is undoubtedly entitled to do for the purpose. Of course, I refer to the surplus income of public religious endowments, choultries, etc., so numerous in this part of India. I have not the slightest hesitation in asserting that the application for educational work of funds belonging to this class of endowments, after duly providing for what may be spoken of as the primary services in every such institution, is perfectly consistent with the highest Hindu authority and usage. Religion, public worship and the study of sciences, higher and lower, were inseparably connected parts of an organic whole under the social polity established by the ancient ordinance. The sharp line of demarcation now sought by some to be drawn in connection with the question of the application of the surplus income of public endowments for purposes of education is utterly alien to Hindu sentiment. There was a time when, as observed by Bhagavan Das, "there were attached to great temples not only the counterparts of what we name to-day schools and colleges and hospitals, but also even

museums, parks, gardens, and theatres and places of dance and song, and of other amusement and recreation; such institutions being placed in the shadow of the temple, on the general principle which pervades all the ancient culture, of subordinating and refining the physical to and by the super-physical, and not allowing the latter to be coarsened and degraded by, and into, the former" (pp. 270 and 271, *The Science of Social Organisation*) By way of an argument against any doubt that may occur as to the truth of the picture suggested in this last sentence, reference may be made to the fact that temple-festivals, with their attendant processions and tamashas, so common down to this day, are but degenerate survivals of old institutions introduced with the intention among others of providing for the masses recreation and amusement which, by their association with religion, would be protected from becoming mere harmful carnivals, while the pageants themselves would naturally tend to attract to the shrines a concourse of worshippers who may not otherwise attend.

I think I may next most appropriately quote a part of a paragraph which recently appeared in the *Times of India*, headed "Moslem Endowments," as affording an exceedingly striking corroboration of the view that in the East religious worship, charity, education, and even the practice of arts, have, among all peoples and at all times, been inseparably linked together. The passage which I wish to quote runs thus: "To the Mussalman the mosque is a place of worship, and it is many things more. It is the Hall of the corporation, where public meetings take place. In the early days of the Caliphate, before the aristocratic tendencies of Omayyides and contact with the luxurious lives of the Romans and the Persians, changed the simple habits of the Moslems, the mosque was also the council-chamber and hall of audience of the Commander of the Faithful. To the "Son of the Road" the mosque is also the best and cheapest of hotels. But above all, the mosque has always been the only school-house known to the true Believer. To this day the largest University in the world is

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Al-Azhar Zami of Cairo. And as Islam does not recognise any divisions of human concern such as spiritual and temporal, the instructions imparted in these seminaries has been both religious and secular. The scepticism and materialism of Greek Philosophy were taught in the same mosque in which the God of Islam was being worshipped five times a day. To this our Unani, or Greek medicine, is taught in the mosques of India".

Lastly, I shall ask your permission to cite one valuable piece of evidence as to the actual usage in our part of India as it existed at about the beginning of the present regime.

In a communication from the Raja of Tanjore to the British Resident, dated the 1st January, 1801, will be found a brief account of the practice and procedure then prevailing in the great endowments founded in that district by the Rulers of the Mahratha dynasty. It shows that these establishments were not merely rest-houses for the use of travellers but also places of worship as well as of education, orphan-

ages, together with a sort of general hospital with maternity wards annexed. After stating that the number of people who passed periodically by the roads along which the charities existed amounted to many thousands, and that every one of them without the least distinction of caste or creed received food, His Highness made among other observations the following: "And to each of them—chatrams, a pagoda, choultries and schools are annexed. In each chatram a teacher to teach the four *Vedas* is appointed, and a school-master and doctors skilful in the cure of diseases, swellings and the poison of reptiles. All the orphans of strangers who may come to the chatram are placed under the care of the school-master. They are also fed three times a day, and once in four days they are anointed with oil. They receive medicine when they require it. Clothes are given to them and the utmost attention paid to them. They are instructed in the sciences to which they may express a preference. Travellers who fall sick at the chatram or before their arrival receive medicines

and the diet proper for them, and are attended with respect and kindness till their recovery. Milk is provided for infants, and pregnant women are entertained with kindness and if they happen to be delivered at the chatram their expenses are defrayed. Medicines are given to them and they are permitted to remain in the chatram three months after their delivery."

In short, the plea for educational work being allowed to participate to some extent in the expenditure of the surplus income of public endowments, religious or charitable, originated generally by royal grants, must be understood as standing on the unshakable foundation that, according to the Sanatana Dharma, not only knowledge of the Scriptures, but also diligent cultivation of the sciences, logic, grammar, philosophy, metaphysics, and the like, is among the things indispensable to the attainment of spiritual illumination, the goal of human progress.

The importance of the functions of the teacher, I may say in conclusion, is shown in the much misunderstood Vaidic texts

containing the allegory as to the origin of the castes; it pays the most flattering compliment possible to the dignity of the vocation in question when it makes the Brahmana—not those who without the necessary qualification, claim that high title, but the true knowers and teachers—to issue forth from the mouth of the Creator.

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